# SELF PUBLISHER!™

★ MAGAZINE ★

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MUSICAL GUESTS

FORD THEATRE REUNION!

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# SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

Nobody ever said changing the world would be easy. Change is something most people resist, and take their time to warm up to. So, I understand that it's easy to dismiss SP! as something that can change how new people find out about new things from new publishers. And I understand that there are people out there who will actively speak against our effort, because it means admitting that what they are doing isn't working. I've been running hard into brick walls all over lately. I've been doing that, because we all need to see where those walls are, and how hard they really are.

Frankly, I've been told to give up. That SP! cannot work, that it will fail, and that I'm foolish. I've also been told that what we're doing is great, it is worthy, and that there is hope that it will continue and grow. I'm trying to gain that true perspective of what steps to take and when to take them. I've got some great ideas brewing, but I'm in a bit of a limbo right now. I'd love to lay it all out, show you a roadmap, and all that. But I've done that in the past, had my ideas copied, and been left in the dust by people better funded than I. The only thing I really have going for me is the history. I've been around and I've never given up. I've seen great stuff fail, and awful stuff succeed. The only things of real value I have from all of it are some great, lifelong friendships. Money comes and goes. Stories come and go. And a lot of times, so do people. But the ones that stick around are pure gold.

I have been working on updates to the Self Publisher Hall of Fame archives, for about six months. I've done it quietly, plugging away, setting up about 4000 new entries that are going to start going live very soon, because I'm done with the pages. I just finished them a few days ago as I write this. I have some database stuff to do to make the new presentation work and then I'll be posting. The Hall of Fame continues to be just a basic idea, though... It's not yet the full foundation I want to make it into. Why am I even talking about it in light of what I said above? Well, it is an illustration of my commitment to SP! For 20-some years, I have been trying to get it to be what I envision. And every setback, or huge industry shift, or personal failing, has just made me more determined that SP! is worth it. And if you have read this far into this editorial, you are worth it. Whether you are a creator or a fan of this small-press stuff, the fact you are there means I will be here, no matter what. We're going to change the world, I mean we have before... so why not now? Sure, the internet has completely changed everything, but people are still people, and what really matters will still be the people... so SP! will continue to focus on that.

- Ian Shires

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## Graphic Illusions Comics
by Ian shires

I've been catching up with the editor-in-chief of Graphic Illusions Comics, David Welcher and the creator/writer of Intrepid, Jose Loeri, both of whom are heading up the beginning of the Second Wave Universe. Having now read issues 1 through 6 of the flagship title, Intrepid, let's get to know more about things.

SP!: So hello, David and Jose! One of the first things I noted when diving into Intrepid, was that we're looking at a darker, grittier world than the one we live in History has played out a little differently there, so you're not just putting out a new universe for stories to take place in, you're giving it backstory and leaving it all open, slowly filling in pieces of the past. How big do you envision this getting?

Jose: The Second Wave Universe is huge; there's no doubt about that. We have tons upon tons of character bios, timelines, primers, and various other plot development tools waiting to be unleashed. So, the backstory will be told. However, we believe in telling stories progressively, so we're not in a rush to get it all out.

David: Exactly. What we show in the first story arc of Intrepid, Heroes & Villains, is nothing but the tip of the iceberg in relation to the size and scope of the Second Wave Universe. It is meant to be a jumping-on point for readers, but there is definitely more to it.

Jose: And as far as the SWU being dark and gritty, I wouldn't say that's necessarily the case. The events of Heroes & Villains are a snapshot of a specific set of circumstances, and THOSE circumstances are fairly dark.

I promise you, however, the sun is shining somewhere else. This isn't a nihilistic vision of the future. There are playgrounds with children laughing, high schools with teenagers getting bitten by radioactive bugs, and coffee shops with couples falling in love. On a day-to-day level, the SWU isn't insanely different from our world. The darkness is institutionalized, but the SWU's citizens don't notice it. Life goes on, until something REALLY bad happens. But that's another story for another story arc.

SP!: Beyond the vision of what you want to accomplish, have you planned out how you plan to keep your company afloat in today's market, so that you can, indeed, bring forth this universe, and bring others into it?

David: Essentially, our objective is to get as many eyes on our stories as possible, in the most efficient way possible. We understand that as small press publishers, we don't have the big bucks for marketing and advertising that the major publishers may. Our approach has to be a bit more organic and grass-roots in nature. We plan to develop our presence in our local market and expand outwards.

That being said, the major crux of our plan to stay afloat in a dwindling comic book market relies on the quality of our stories and the appeal of our storytelling methodology. We here at Graphic Illusions Comics consider our company an American manga company. To explain simply, our stories are immersed in a definite American genre, but we take a very manga-esque or, more specifically, a shonen approach to telling those stories.

Jose: And to piggyback on top of that: most people believe comics began with the "maxi-series". We live in the era of annual "events," with multi-title crossovers and a new

shocking death every week. That's not what had me running to the comic shop as a kid to get the next issue of Uncanny X-Men. People forget that The Phoenix Saga's natural story arc started in issue 101, with the payoff in issue 138. That's not a maxi-series, it's just writing a comic. Byrne and Claremont took the time to make you care about the X-Men first. That's what made the Saga relevant. That's the essence of American manga: characters first, "events" second. It's not the easiest way to gain a fan base nowadays, but we think it's the right way.

SP!: You're working with Benjamin Slabak, he of the Cloud 9 apps. I don't think it's news to any of our readers that he and I have been doing a lot of talking lately. What led you to taking your digital presence to an exclusive with Cloud 9?

David: Honestly, it was Benjamin in a lot of ways. There definitely are larger digital outlets out there, but larger can also mean easier to get lost. Benjamin has always made us feel like a priority, and that Cloud 9 being a "haven for digital releases" for small press companies wasn't just talk. We feel that he is considerate of us as clients, and he is open to input and feedback.

Jose: Agreed. Small publishers get buried at the bottom of the totem pole when they deal with some of the larger digital distributors. Ben lets his clients know that they matter.

SP!: Let's spread the love a bit. Tell us about some of the other folks you are working with, what they are doing within the scope of building a universe, and how they came to be a part of it.

Jose: The creative contributors to the SWU comprise the three-headed monster of David-Alan-Jose; that's the two of us, along with Alan Cole, also a partner in the company. We come up with the characters and stories that make up the SWU. We work with various talented artists, including Montos, who was the artist on the Intrepid: Heroes & Villains story arc. Along with him, we have our art director, J.P. Mavinga, who also provided covers for chapter six and our upcoming trade paperback. Then there's Rob Richardson, aka Ovalpro Studios, who provided lettering, and Stan Webb, who provided additional lettering and design work. We've got a good hard-working crew propping this monster up.

David: We don't want to forget Jorge Correa, who did the artwork on Brooklyn Blur in our Shonen Double Feature #1. And while we are on SDF 1, I want to point out that Rob Richardson pulled double duty for us, as he did the art for Lightning Rod. So we really are trying to build a strong support network with some talented folks to get this thing going.

SP: And then, there's you. How did you come to be a publisher?

David: Wow, that's a tough one. I think it sprang from the fact that we are all huge comic book geeks ourselves. Jose pointed out earlier that he was making the trek to the comic book shop to get his Uncanny X-Men fix when he was a kid, and that's pretty much true for all of us. Well, not just X-Men, of course, but comics in general. We all love comics. And that love translated into a desire to create them, and not just someone else's either. We wanted to get in there and create our own. I think we all feel that way. So, the desire to publish our own comics grew from that.

Jose: Comics have given and still give me a lot of joy. Publishing is a way to give something back.

SP: Besides comics, what else is in your life? Married? Children? Hobbies that aren't more comics?

Jose: In order: sports, no, no, and The Beatles.

David: Well said, Jose. No, we have plenty of other things going on in our lives. Our partner Alan and I are both married to very supportive and understanding wives (yes, yes, shameless brown-nosing). I'm the only one with kids. I can't say that I have a lot in terms of hobbies, but I have many other interests outside of comics. I definitely love music (but not just The Beatles), going to the movies, watching television, and playing video games. I love doing all sorts of crap with the kids too. So, we all lead full lives, I'd say.

SP!: With the 6-issue Intrepid first story arc complete, and TPB coming up, what else is in the works for G.I. Comics? Give us a taste of what's in store for the people we've met so far, and the new characters coming in?

Jose: For G.I. Comics, it's a more of a marathon than a sprint, so don't expect us to drop a new title every two or three months. Getting Intrepid through its first two story arcs is very important to us. Heroes & Villains, along with the follow up story arc, Pandora's Cage, does more than set up the title as the flagship book of the SWU; it lays the ground work for future SWU titles.

David: True. Pandora's Cage is certainly going to be a game changer for us, story-wise. Heroes & Villains gets you to the theater, but Pandora's Cage definitely sets the stage. There are some vital characters being introduced or reintroduced in that arc, so it is definitely something to look forward to.

Jose: We also have the second issue of Shonen Double Feature in production and we're very pleased with its progress. SDF shows a different side of the SWU, one that's a lot less "dark" and "gritty" and, in a lot of ways, more fun. We're proud of it and we want to get it on its feet as well.

SP!: I want to make sure you've had the chance to get out everything you want to for our readers, so here's your chance, the floor is yours; what else would you like to add?

Jose: We're trying our best to do things the right way. We're telling stories you can grow with. Stories you don't have to worry about changing "direction" every other month or year. We're in it for the long haul and we want you to come along with us. We promise you characters, not EVENTS; sagas, not REBOOTS. Invest in our stories and you'll get entertainment that'll last longer than just NOW!

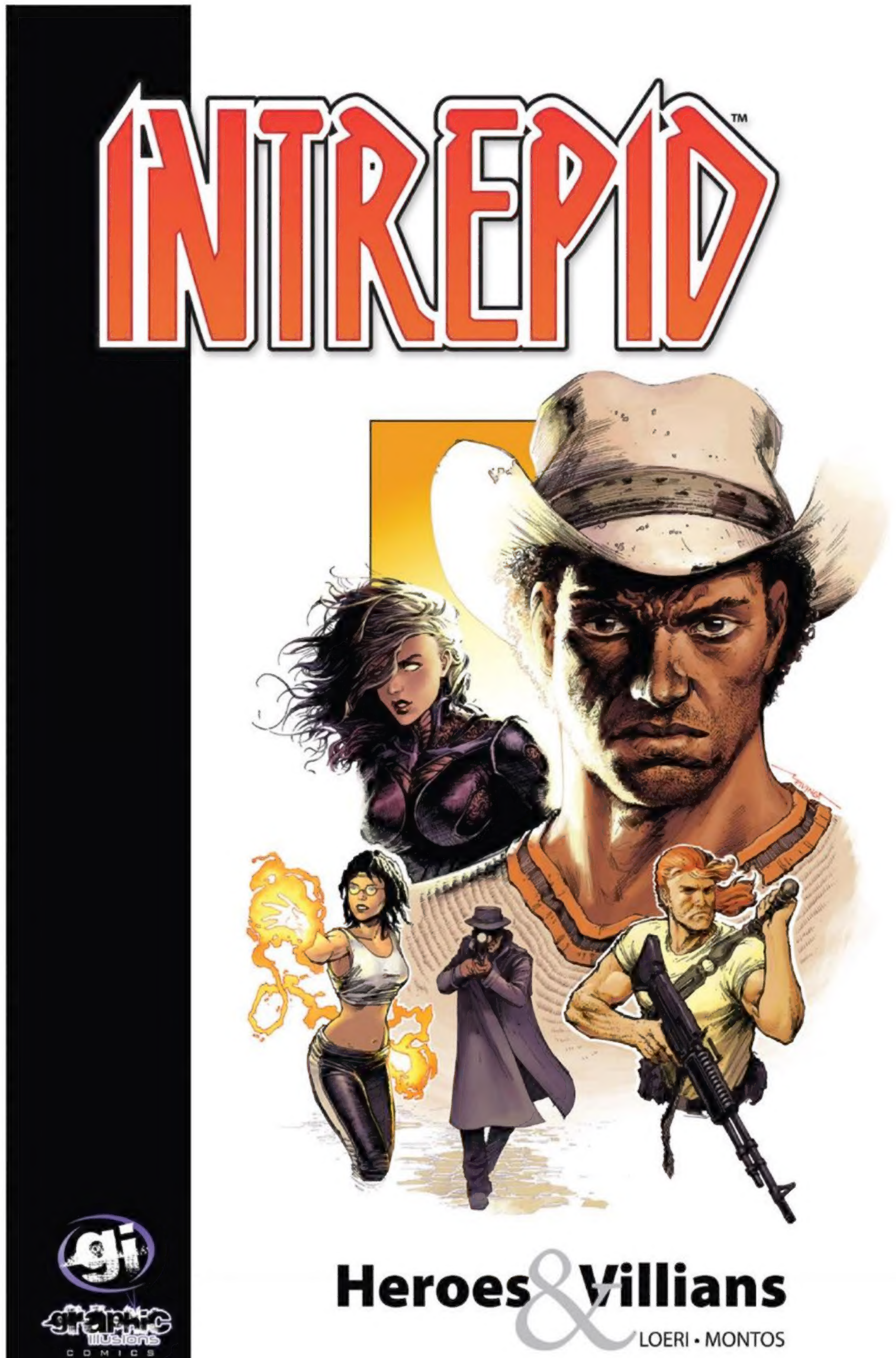
Long story short, if you want stories that stick to your ribs, GIC books are what you need to be reading.

David: I couldn't agree with you more Jose. I mean, if you

like comics, especially manga, then G.I. Comics is definitely worth taking a look at. We are invested in telling and getting great stories out there. We understand the stereotype of the small press publisher starting a story, and stopping midway through. Getting you interested and then leaving you high and dry.

I know that what we are doing is exceptionally ambitious, and I can't say for certain that this will come off exactly how we want it to. But what I can guarantee, especially if the readers are interested, is that we will never stop mid-arc. If we start a story, we will definitely finish it for you.

I mean, we've all spent almost 15 years in some form or another working to get to this point, so we plan to work our asses off to make sure that the stories that we put out are quality stories that you'll want to read.



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DIE AMERICAN SOW!
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
YEAH, RIGHT. THIS'LL TAKE LIKE, TEN SECONDS
HAVING FUN, LITTLE GIRL?
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# A Written View

BY DOUGLAS OWEN

## ANY CHANCE YOU GET

Artists can be flaky, hard to talk to, difficult to pin down, flighty and completely irresponsible. How do I know this? Because I am an artist, and I've just described me.

A few days ago, Ian emailed me concerning an interview I had lined up, but I was still waiting for a response from the interviewee. For some reason, the writer I had lined up failed to email back responses for the second and last phase of our interview. After two reminders, I decided she just did not have the concern or time. I guess it was not that important to her.

There is now a half-finished interview sitting in my email, glaring at me, challenging the concept embedded in my mind that I always finish what I start. It was not to be.

So, in this month's column, I would like to pass on some words of wisdom. No, I am not a guru in this, just someone who knows from experience as an interviewer and artist.

Your name is your brand.

Some of you are wondering what I mean by the above statement. Let me explain it in simple terms. When you self-publish, the audience identifies you by your name. What you need to do is get your brand or name, out there. People need to identify your name with the genre, be it graphic art, music, short stories or novels. You want people to recognize your name and connect it to your art.

One way of doing so, is to make sure your name gets into print. You achieve this by not only getting your work out there, but by giving talks, presentations and interviews. The biggest one is interviews.

Why do I say that interviews are the best way to get your name out there? Because you control what the audience gets to know about you. When you have a good interviewer, they will guide you through the interview process and build the questions based on your responses. The steady steps bring together the whole picture your audience will see.

Furthermore, it will allow those following you to see the inner artist(s) they think so highly of. You are not building your brand.

Be wary though, for your brand can be damaged easily by not following through, especially if you requested the interview. Doors start closing, for people in the industry talk to one another. Take the interview I was unable to complete. If that person decides to pursue an interview with another paper or magazine and I am asked my opinion, I will say that they never completed the interview process. With such a recommendation, do you think they will continue the interview process with this person? Of course not. The interviewer will be under the impression the interviewer will, after a point, stop the interview, leaving it in an incomplete state.

With the loss of an interview, the interviewee will lose free advertisement.

Let me repeat that for you: FREE ADVERTISEMENT.

With rising costs for promotion, an interview is one way to push your product to the people whom you may not be able to otherwise reach, due to limitations in your own budget. Why would you want that to happen? One interview, covering two-to-five pages, is your brand, dangled in front of the noses of those who are looking for you.

And if that is not enough, look at the costs involved. A five-page ad, which your target audience wants to read and be enthralled with, would normally cost hundreds, if not thousands of dollars. With the readers seeing your interview—which amounts to a free ad—even if only one percent of those readers charge and buy your publication, the interview would be well worth it.

Can you afford to lose a free advertisement such as this? I know I couldn't, and knowing the interview could be picked up by another magazine or paper, only adds an incentive.

Don't give up the chance for free advertisement. Volunteer for interviews in publications whenever the chance comes available and see it through!

# COSPLAY DOCUMENTARY

An interview with Uke, president of Cosplayer Nation (Interview by Katrina).

There's a new documentary in the making, something that touches on a topic near to the heart of just about any anime or comic book convention attendee. Maybe you've never participated in it, and you might not even have thought about doing it, but if you've been to at least one decent-sized convention, you've witnessed others who gave in to temptation. The normal people on the outside of this finite "geek scope" often stop them to ask the one question that encompasses it all. "So, what's going on here… is it a costume party or a masquerade ball?"

No, ma'am. It's cosplay. Yes, sir, we're dressed up like this because we love the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles just that much. No, we're not crazy. Well, sir or madam, I'm not sure how putting on a costume constitutes worshiping Satan, but if you say so…

Cosplay is short for "costume play". There is something to be said for dressing up as a make-believe character and roaming around in public showing off your duds, especially at a comic book or anime convention. Let's face it: the fun is introduced to us at Halloween and for many of us, it never dies. It just lives on and on, only we graduate from pretending to be giant pumpkins and move onto being our favorite character. Usually we make the move in our childhood—somewhere between the ages of five and –ten—and many people leave the phase when they stop trick or treating. Then, there are the rest of us who move from being the theme character of the year into being the theme character of our lives; Mr. Spock, Vash of Trigun fame, or Slave Leia.

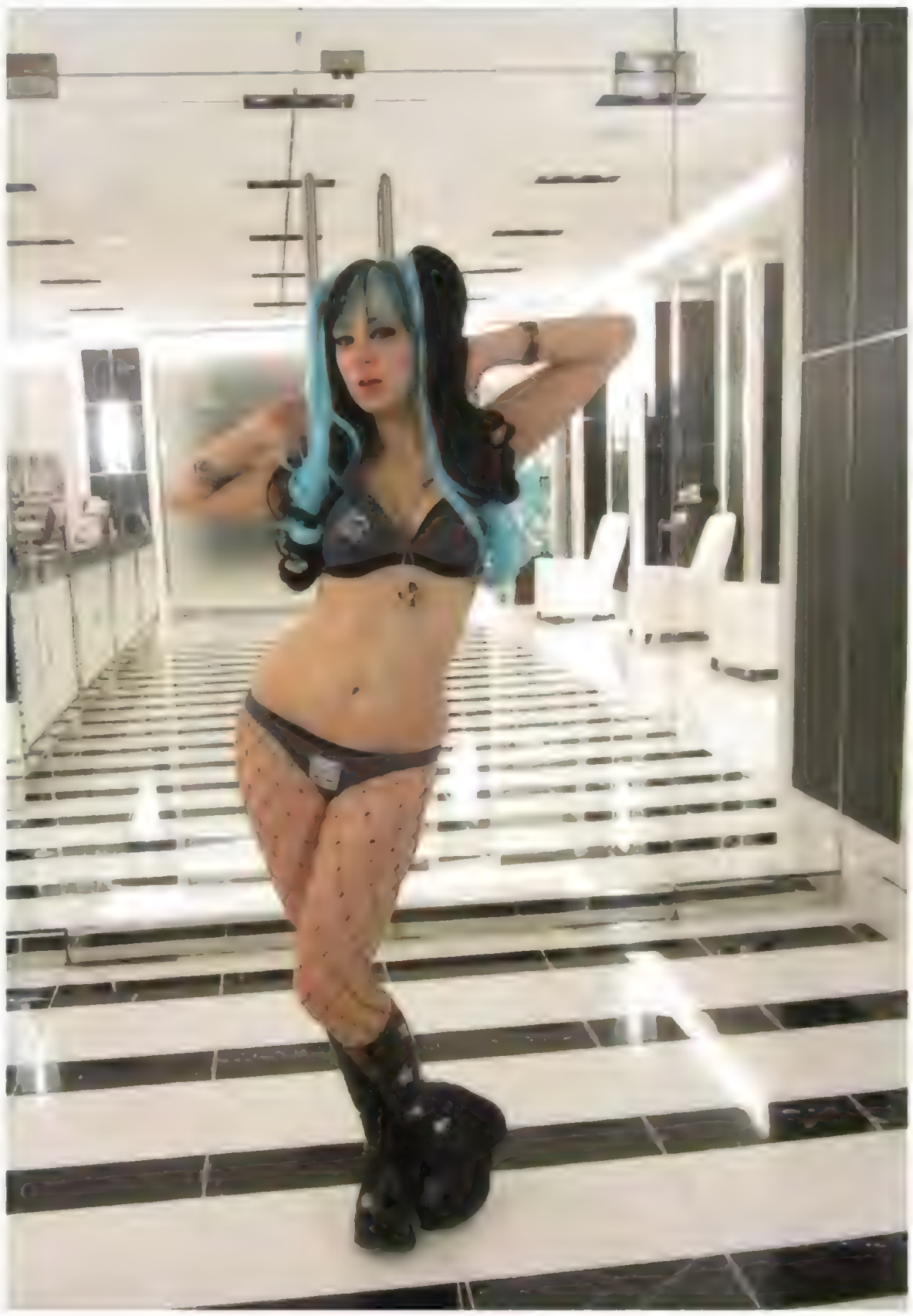
We don't skimp on our costumes either. We spend a good deal of money to have them made, we look for authentic items, and we pray for good quality. If we make our costumes ourselves, we're given a thumbs up even if our efforts aren't as good as the factory models. And while floating around the other people in costume we feel pretty, oh so pretty. With the costumes comes the inevitable behavior. There are costume contests, photo shoots, and people play-acting in the halls. A spectator learns to recognize even the most obscure of webcomic characters when there's a cosplayer nearby. And almost everyone is quick with a smile for the camera.

This is what the minds behind Cosplayer Nation have set out to capture. It all started in Boston, when a mere filmmaker major named Uke was given press badges for the first Anime Boston Convention in 2003 for his film project. Eight years later, a job with Avid, and one mockumentary later, Joshua Adams took notice. The minds met and a cosplay documentary was soon in the works. The hard work is underway. Uke says, "The fact, that I still find time to work at Avid, while co-producing/managing this documentary, while being its PR guy for cons, and traveling on the weekends, is mayhem. But this is what I have had to do for this labor of love."

It's a lot of hard work, but it definitely has its advantages. First off, the press badges are a real perk. They get you into places you

normally can't go at some functions. It tends to encourage the con people to be nicer to you. ;-) And it gives you an excuse to sneak into the girl's bathroom. Okay, maybe you can't go that far, unless you're actually female.

Like with any proper adventure or decent RPG, the team of two became the team of four. Uke is now accompanied by John Chea—he of the "wickedly large camera mount" and maker of the holy cosplay documentary animated logo—and Camilo Jalil, official Cosplayer Nation photographer. Their presence has pushed the documentary forward and helped it to branch out. "It's important to note, we started out as mostly video shoots (being a documentary)," Uke says, when I ask who is involved in the project. "Now, we are branching out into photography; there's a blog we try to update occasionally on conventions."



Speaking of blogs, you can find collected clips and even a music video of footage they've gathered at http://www.youtube.com/CosplayerNationTV. It's filled with costume focus—enviable flat bellies, Disney villains, and the loveable Monarch from the Venture Brothers. Guest liaisons? Yes, they have them. Interviews? Of course! What documentary is complete without them? But beware, watching these sneak previews could lead you to believe that perhaps the documentary has no focus. Maybe, you'll end up thinking, as I did, that this is going to be one of those films where a lot of footage is randomly slapped together and labeled "documentary".

"The documentary started with no real focus," Uke confirms for me. "We decided to film a bunch of cosplayers at certain events in New England, probably as far as New York or Maryland. If you'd asked me back then if I ever thought of going to Hawaii or South Dakota, the answer would have been no (but now we have). We thought of making the focus on how cosplayers differed in each state, like Massachusetts versus New Jersey. Then we wanted to add the "negative" stuff, since some cosplay documentaries we watched didn't always touch on the negatives. Then there was making cosplay, and the issue of how to define cosplay for a newcomer."

Even with that much in mind, the documentary still needed a firm direction for shooting, and that became apparent when they did a screening at Emerson College. "It was Dec 2012," Uke reflects. (If we had been speaking out of doors, a mysterious wind would surely have ruffled his hair.) "I felt really accomplished with what we made up to that point. But a bunch of people kept asking us, what the focus was. So I felt lost again, after all that work. But I knew it was true: we didn't have a focus. It kinda went everywhere at once. Eventually, I sat down and outlined everything like a chapter book. One thing was for sure…"

The goal had been attained. Their documentary, as Uke realized, was about 'Cosplay in America'. Uke explains, "Our documentary, as of now, starts with the history of cosplay and how it blew up in America. It then transitions to Americans making cosplay, tips, conventions around America, Cosplayers growing up in America… and the rest is under wraps for now."

Under wraps indeed. Belly wraps, legs wraps, and decisive "this is what we're doing" wraps. Although the website and blog don't seem to give much of a hint right now about how they're going to handle the information and present this very colorful aspect of our nation's geekery, you have nothing to worry about. These guys know where they're going with this. And it appears this documentary may not be "a wrap" when it's finally done.

"I assure you, that we have a very cool ending that may lead to a sequel," Uke says. We all can only wait in anticipation.

In the meantime, if you're a con-goer keep a good watch on the con news. You never know, Cosplay Documentary may happen in your area, in which case… you're going to want to dress your best.

# TALES FROM THE AMAZING MR. KAV

An interview with Anand "Kav" Kaviraj (interview by Ellen Fleischer).

Anand "Kav" Kaviraj has been making comics for decades. His portfolio includes such titles as Rapid City, Tales from the Void, The Amazing Mr. X, and "Perspectives".

To overcome a period of artist's block, Kav, together with Rapid City writer Josh Dahl, developed the Rapid City Dailies. Kav drew and posted a panel daily. Josh then added whatever dialogue and narration he thought warranted. Based on that narration, Kav posted the next panel a day later. Neither creator knew in advance what the other would do; they simply 'went with it.'

More recently, Kav drew "Perspectives," a comics short story which Mike Carroll (writer of Jennifer Blood: First Blood) declared "the single best thing he read in any format in 2012"! Kav was gracious enough to share some of his wisdom and experiences with SP! Magazine this month.

### SP!: How long have you been making comics?

Kav: I've been making comics for 40 years, but seriously for three. I was at a convention three years ago where a guy needed an inker. I was confident in my skills, but my finished product sucked. That's when I realized I needed to really buckle down if I wanted to be good. I met writer Tony Wright on Digital Webbing, and we started The End of Paradise—a crime thriller for which we did 140 pages. I also did the 38-page Dr Death vs the Vampire, an adaptation of the short story by Aaron Schutz from the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, and 130 pages for Dr Death vs the Zombie, an original work written by Tony [Doug Wright], based on the character. I was hand-lettering and the lettering wasn't so good, so we scrapped the projects and I started working on Rapid City with Josh Dahl. I've drawn six issues of this comic, three of which have been printed.

### SP!: Tell me a bit about your background (education, training, etc). Did you always plan to be in this field? How did you break in?

Kav: I have some training in art, but switched my major to Biology. I never stopped drawing, though.

### SP!: Have you always self-published? What made you decide to go that route?

Kav: It is incredibly hard to break in and get a publisher, so self-publishing was my only creative outlet. Just to give you an idea how hard it is, for an experiment I submitted some sample pages from one of Marvel's best artists to a mid-level publisher. I was rejected and they excoriated the pages. That's right, even one of Marvel's top guys, if he was unknown, couldn't get hired by a publisher! I tell hopeful artists a lot that "It is essentially impossible to break into comics—try something easier, like becoming a famous actor". I did have one feature which was printed in Mad Magazine #336: Mad's Grab Bag of Helpful Hints.

### SP!: Who or what would you consider to be the major influences on your work?

Kav: Curt Swan and Sean Phillips are my major influences. I was corresponding with Sean for a while—he's a great guy—but I bugged him too much and he stopped responding to me and I don't blame him.

SP!: How would you describe your artistic style?

Kav: Noir. Using lots of blacks and shadows and a gritty realistic style. I like to use references, so everything looks right.

SP!: What can you tell us about RAPID CITY? What, in your opinion, sets it apart from other superhero comics?

Kav: Rapid City is a departure from regular superhero tales; it focuses on becoming a superhero. Many a night did the hero, Kinetic, spend looking for crime to fight and go home empty handed. It's a character-driven—as opposed to plot-driven—series.

SP!: Tell us a bit about the heroes and villains? What are their goals and motivations?

Kav: For Rapid City, the heroes want to become known. The villains have selfish goals for personal gain.

SP!: The RAPID CITY DAILIES sound like fun! How did you make that work?

Kav: We were experimenting with the 'Marvel Method,' where the writer fills in the dialogue after the art is drawn. It didn't really work for us, but it was a learning experience.

SP!: Have either of you ever been stumped by what the other did? If so, how did you deal?

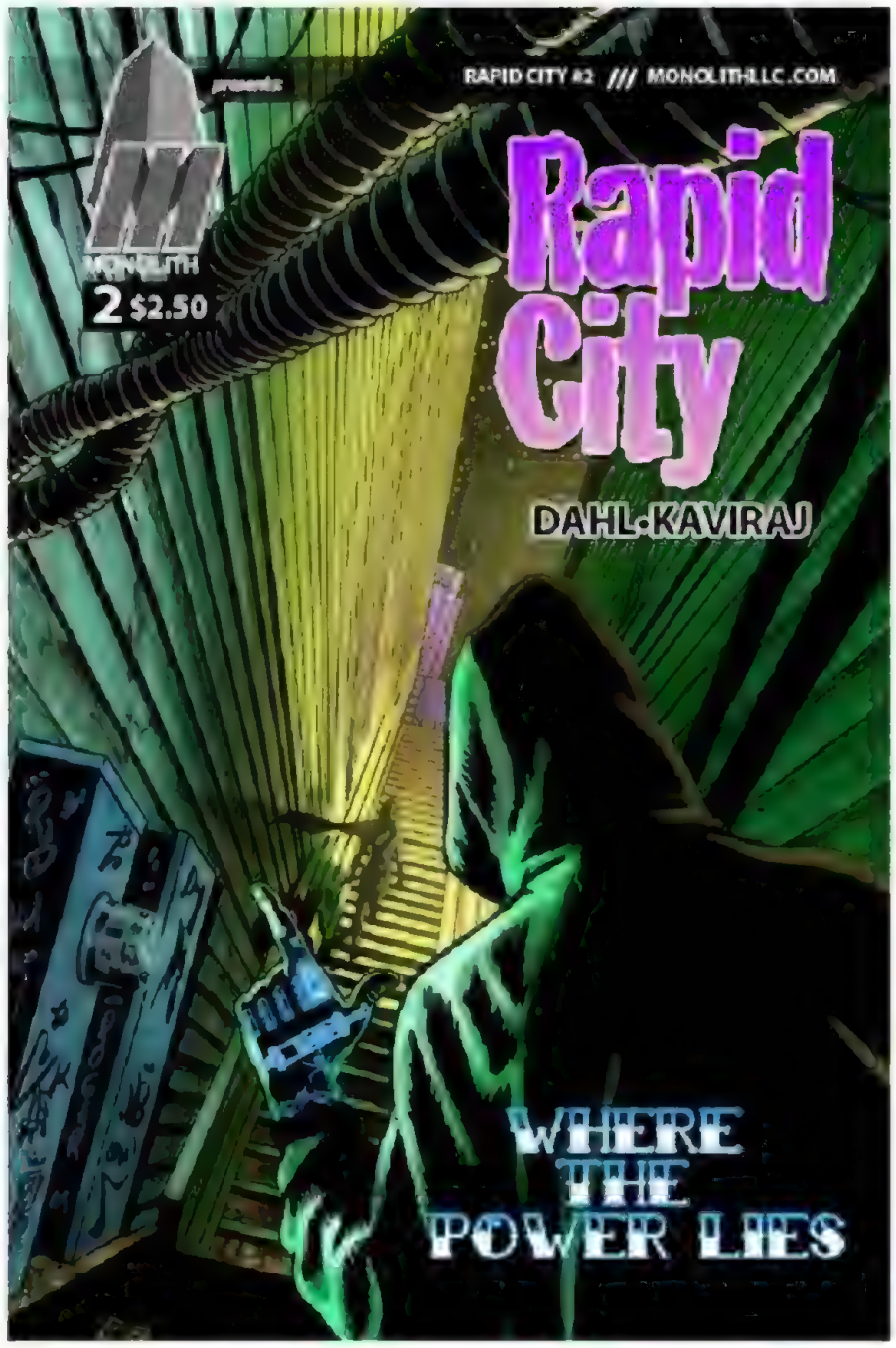
Kav: I have had numerous occasions of haranguing my writers about plot points that I felt didn't make sense. Usually we come to some sort of compromise. Art changes I make without question—I actually drew 25 versions of the cover for Rapid City #1!

SP!: Let's talk about TALES FROM THE VOID. What can you share about the stories it contains?

Kav: It's a retro look back at the great Twilight Zone and Outer Limits, with some 40s pulp thrown in. Each story has a shock ending and one reviewer actually said the story "Sunshine" made him gasp. That's why we did the cover in the pulp 'stressed (worn)' style. The title is in the font from Startling Stories.

SP!: How about the creative process? Did you brainstorm ideas and character designs together?

Kav: This book came about in a strange manner. I was between projects and didn't have anything to draw, so I put an ad in Digital Webbing under 'artist looking for interesting offers'. There're always a ton of writers looking for artists, so I knew I would get a big response. Most of the writing was, as usual, really bad, but Darrin O'Toole sent me a story idea that sounded interesting—




about a normal guy in a dead end job who doesn't know it, but he's a superhero. We started collaborating and tossing story ideas back and forth. One story, "Where walks the Madman," was written by Darrin after I sent him an interesting pulp Sci Fi cover. That book got a LOT of attention at the Dublin International Comics Expo by the likes of Keiron Gillen, Matt Fraction, and Declan Shalvey, among countless others. Darrin heard it was the only topic of discussion among the talent during lunch! So we're very proud of it.

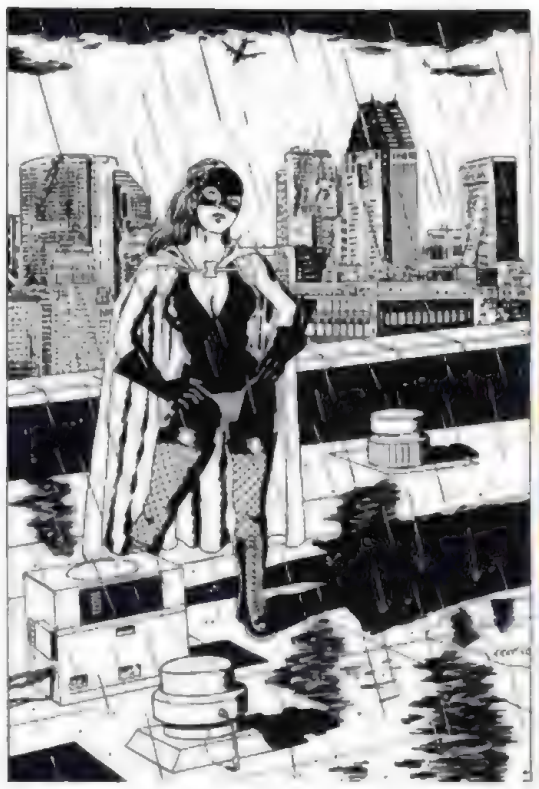
SP! I see you recently created an AMAZING MR X story which won £500 in the Dundee Comics Prize competition. Congratulations on that! I confess I'm not that familiar with homegrown UK superheroes (though I was an EXCALIBUR fan, back in the 90s!). Can you educate me? Who is Mr. X?

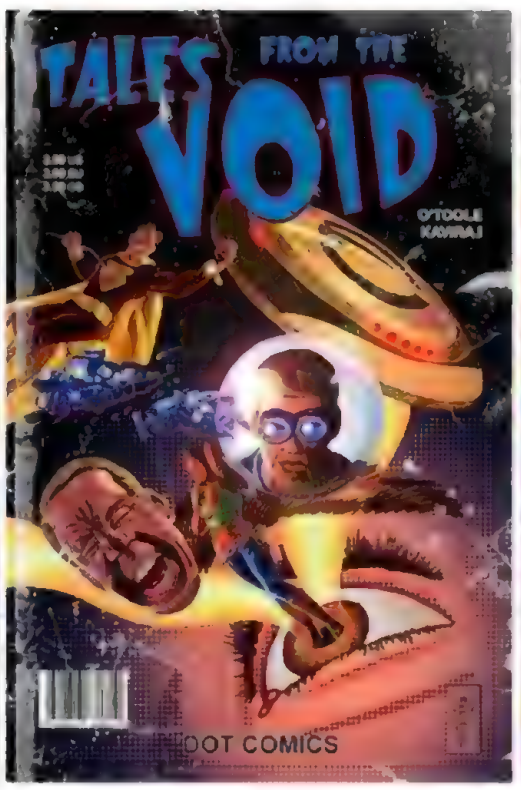
Kav: Mr X was the British response to Superman, a weekly newspaper strip published by DC Thompson, sort of the British 'DC', although his powers were more like Captain America's. Capitalizing on that, Darrin constructed a 3-page story. The judges liked it so much, they requested two more pages, which we quickly pounded out. Artistically, I tried to keep the old school feel, but with an injection of more modern drawing techniques. It's funny, because when Darrin approached me about the contest I said 'no way—those contests are always rigged'. I have never won a single art contest in my life before this. Darrin is an incredible motivator, thank God. Another story he wanted to do for an anthology, a steampunk story, I told him no way—we only had like ten days and no colorist. Darrin said, 'We're making that deadline,' and we did. We got a free marvelous fast colorist, Lance Catan, and the story was picked for the anthology!

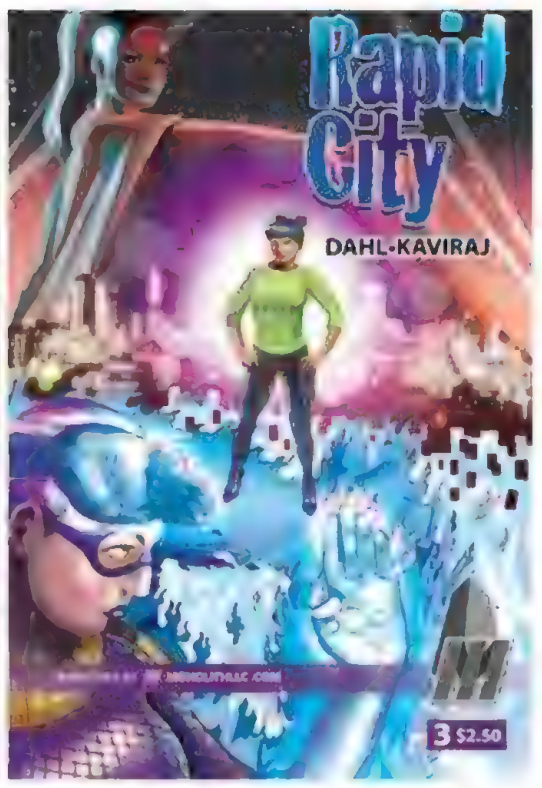
SP!: That must have been some story! Care to share a bit about it?

Kav: It's an origin and update of the 'Mister X' legend. It seems there's a dark shadow across the British Empire, and Mr X recruits the guy who's been hunting him! Great stuff.

SP!: Did you receive any feedback from the judges on what made your submission stand out? If not, do you have any ideas?





Kav: They simply loved the artwork and the way the story held true to the Mister X world. Their praise was high and encouraging.

**SP!: Now, let's talk about "Perspective." How did you come to create this story?**

Kav: Darrin wanted to do a crime story and when I read his script, I was doubtful. I didn't think the story would come across, but once again, Darrin said, "trust me". I did, and once it was drawn, it worked beautifully. sometimes a script doesn't let you know the full impact a drawn story will have… It's gotten 5500 reads online, which is rather incredible for the webcomics world. One pro who works at Dynamite said it was "the single best thing he read in any format in 2012"!

**SP!: The story is available to read online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/116283135/Perspective. Has it appeared in print format, as well?**

Kav: No, but we want to put together a crime book of shorts like we did Sci Fi for Tales.

**SP!: What was the reader reaction?**

Kav: Well what the pro from Dynamite said, and the 5500 reads is QUITE a reaction... You have to realize there are SO MANY webcomics, they rarely get any attention...

**SP!: Finally, at the back of TALES FROM THE VOID, you've listed a couple of upcoming projects: EARTHRULER and STREAMLINERS. Is there something that you can share about these at the present time?**

Kav: Well, I'm not attached to those projects, but Darrin is the writer, so they're bound to be great. Earthruler just got printed and Darrin will be hawking them at Irish Comic Book Month..

**SP!: Have you more projects waiting in the wings?**

Kav: Josh Dahl and myself are BIG Hawkeye fans, and we hate it when David Aja doesn't draw an issue, so we're doing our own Hawkeye book in a Fraction/Aja style, and I gotta say, they script so far is VERY Fractional.

**SP!: Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't touched on yet? Where can folks go to find out more about you and your work?**

Kav: You can check out Champion City Comics, Monolith, and my deviantart portfolio.

There're many other projects I haven't touched on here, including a 3-issue adaptation of the movie The Crimson Mask, a hitman thriller for Mark Bertolini called The Gentlemen's Club, a crime short and real shocker for John Burton called "If Only", an issue of Frater Mine (a metaphysical mind bender), and a retread of Dr Death vs the Zombie. I always keep busy! Recently, I have been doing a lot of art for the novelty company, House of the Unusual—the owner of which has the only known Polaris Nuclear Sub still in existence!

**SP!: Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today! It's been a pleasure.**

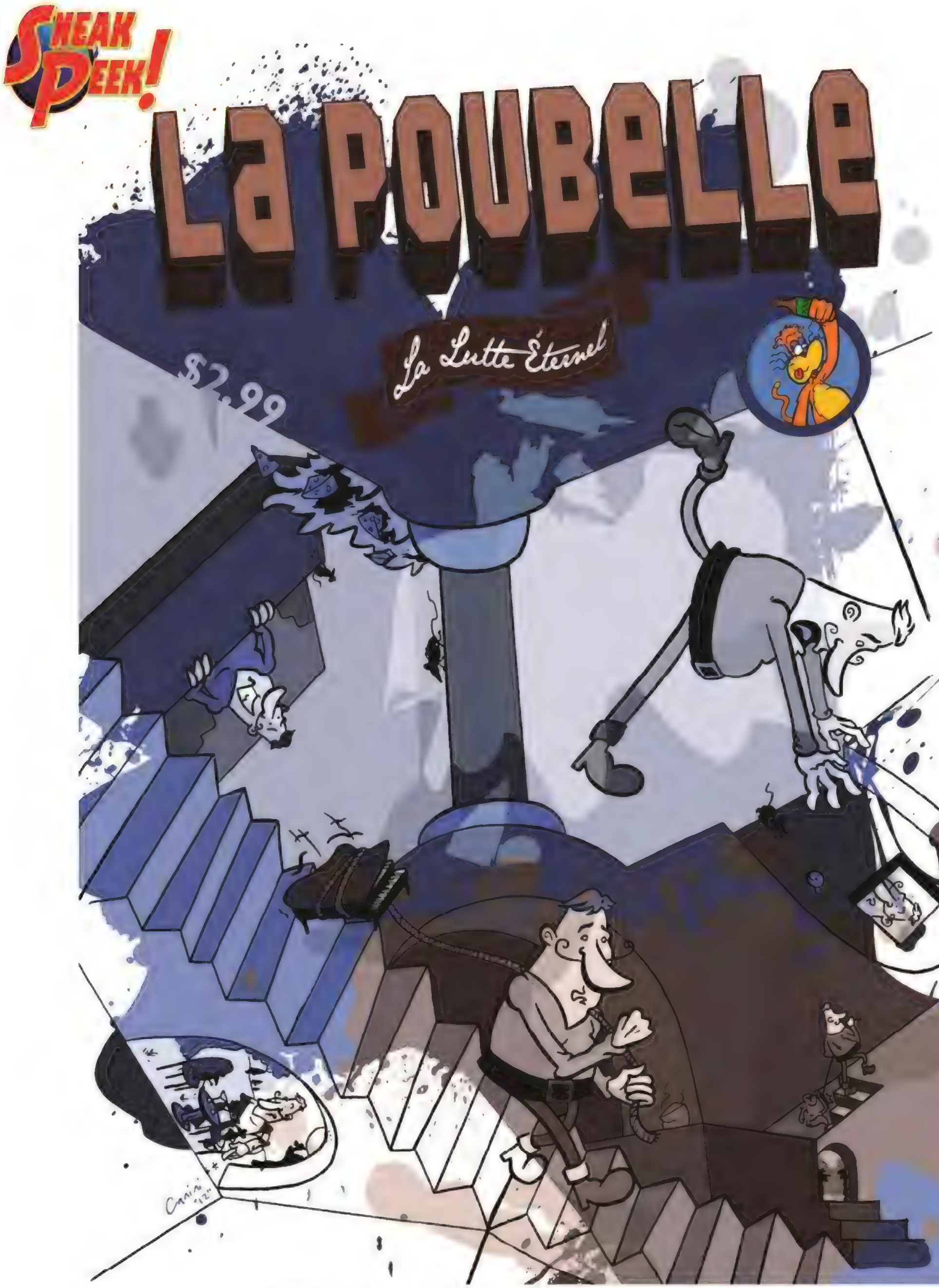
To catch up with Kav, check out:

http://kaviart.deviantart.com/gallery/

http://www.championcitycomics.com/

http://monolithllc.com/

http://www.facebook.com/anand.kaviraj

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# La Poubelle

JE SUIS UN CAMBRIOLEUR!
C'EST BIEN ROBOT QUE T'AS DIT, LÀ?
NON. JE SUIS UN CAMBRIOLEUR ET JE SUIS VENU POUR PIQUER TES POISSONS!
FILE-LES-MOI!
TIENS. PRENDS LE POISON.

http://drunkencatcomics.com/

# La POUBELLE

ET MERDE! J'AI BU LE POISON!!
MAUDIRE CETTE LANGUE DE MERDE!
POURQUOI POISSON ET POISON SE RESSE... RESSEMBLE-T-ILS AUTANT??
ET LÀ, JE MEURS.

http://drunkencatcomics.com/

# La Poubelle

IL Y A UN LAPIN DANS LE PANTALON.
J'AI PAS DE CHANCE. J'AIMERAIS BIEN TROUVER UNE GÉNIE AUJOURD'HUI.
TIENS REGARD! UNE LAMPE. JE LA FROTTERAI.

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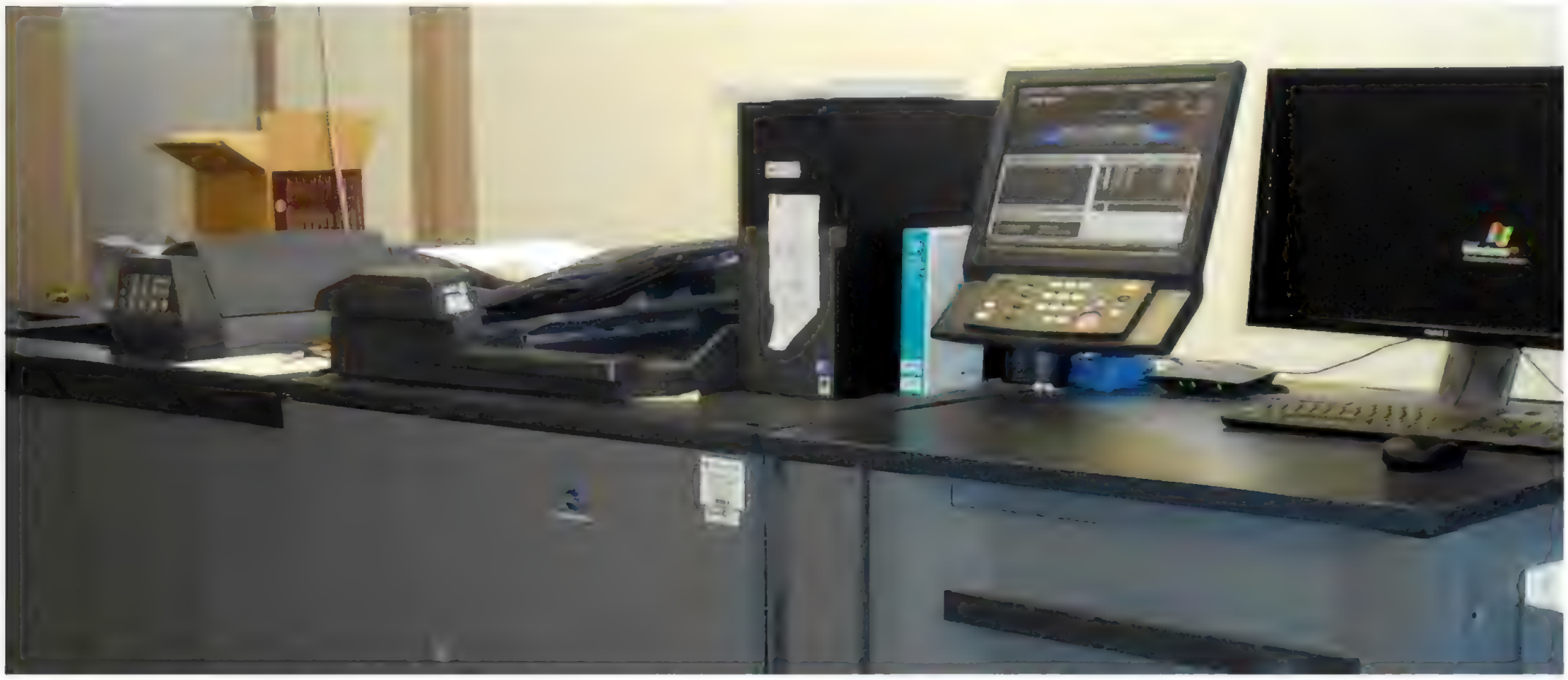
# PRINTING INSIGHT

**An article by (Jennifer "Scraps" Walker).**



As writers and artists, we spend our time concentrating on the creative side of our work—and rightly so. Without the work, we wouldn't have anything to publish. When we put on our publishing hats, though, it helps to remember just what-all we're taking on. As self-publishers, we're responsible for everything involved in getting out work out to the public—including the more technical aspects of working with printers. To that end, it helps to speak the same language as your printer and to know your way around preparing your files correctly for commercial printing.

Requesting a Quote

Unless you're blessed with an unlimited budget, it's a good idea to get a quote from the printers you're interested in working with. Price isn't everything—sometimes it's worth going with a higher price if the quality warrants the increase—but it counts for a lot. In order to request that quote, you'll need to state the specifications of your job clearly.

In addition to the number of books you want a quote on, you'll also need to specify the number of pages and the page size of your book. Contrary to popular belief, sheets and pages are not the same thing. A sheet of paper is a piece of paper with two sides and—therefore—at least two pages. Depending on the size of sheet that the press can handle, a single sheet can be turned into a signature of 4, 8, 16, etc., pages, so "sheets" isn't a spec you give printers; it's something they decide on their own. What you will tell them is how many pages are in your project, including any blanks. Yes, you have to count the blanks, because they represent a piece of the larger puzzle. Your page count will also need to be divisible by four for all but simple copy jobs that are meant to bind with a corner staple or be inserted into a three-ring binder.

To give you a better idea, try this exercise:

Take a standard sheet of 8.5"x11" copy paper. On its own, it has a front and a back, so that's two  pages. Now, give that sheet of paper a quarter turn and fold the left side over to the right (like you would to make a small booklet or half-size comic), and suddenly that single sheet of paper has turned into four pages, each page 5.5" wide and 8.5" tall. Fold that in half again, to 4.25"x5.5" (the usual mini-comic size) and you've now turned that single sheet of 8.5"x11" into a 16-page booklet. This is what commercial printers do, though usually on a much larger scale.

After the number of pages has been established, the next step is determining what those pages will be printed on. Paper (aka stock) comes in different weights and finishes, each with its own use. Standard copy paper is described as 20lb or 50lb offset. The slightly-heavier paper you might use for a resume or other stationery is usually a 24lb or 28lb writing, and often has a texture to it, like linen or laid. Offset (when describing paper) means that it's otherwise uncoated. Writing sheets are also uncoated.

Text stocks have a significant amount of bend in them, going up to 100lb, though 70lb and 80lb are the most common. Cover stocks, on the other hand (used for the expected covers as well as business cards and postcards), can be measured in either weights or

points (10pt, 12pt, etc.). Both text and cover paper can be coated or uncoated. Coated stocks can either be glossy or dull/matte. Coating prevents the ink from seeping into the paper and dulling out the color. Coated sheets tend to hold up a bit better to designs featuring heavy images, either rich with spot blacks or full-color—though opacity is another factor to consider, if your designs feature heavy ink coverage. The best resource is your printer, as the availability and quality of house stocks will vary; asking for samples is a very good idea. At least, go in and take a look at a swatch book.

For a comic book that contains the same paper throughout, you'd request a quote for a "20-page self-cover" (or however many pages it is), but if you want a heavier stock for the cover, then it would be a "16-page plus cover," with the understanding that a wrap-around cover will always be 4 pages. They'll know what you mean.

Binding is the next question you'll need to answer. Saddle-stitching is when staples are used down the folded spine of a book, common in comic books, calendars, and other books that are too thin to perfect bind. Perfect binding is the glued-spine binding, common in trade paperbacks and many graphic novels. The number of pages will dictate whether your book can be bound in either style, though perfect binding usually requires a minimum spine width, because of the way the machines work. Hardback or hardcover binding is a more specialized process, featuring either glued or stitched signatures bound with a book board cover. Not every commercial printer is able to offer this service, but many can contract it out for you if you have room in your budget. It never hurts to ask, right?

When it comes to what's on the pages, you have two ways to approach color: spot color or full-color process. Spot color uses specific colors, as defined by the Pantone Matching System (PMS). Spot-color is a good option if you want something between black-and-white and full-color. It can be used to great effect. Keep in mind, though, that black is a color too, so if you've got a red and black design, you've got a two-color job.

By the same token, with the exception of specialized processes, white is generally not considered a color for ink purposes. In a print job, the white areas are left blank and the color of the paper shows through. If the paper you've chosen isn't stark white, not only will your white spaces be something else, but the colors you've chosen will deepen as well.

Full-color/4-color process means CMYK printing and is a requirement if you're printing anything that includes color photographs or lots of different colors. Instead of mixing a specific color of ink at the beginning, the paper goes through four sets of printing plates, each laying down different strengths of Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black to build the final project. In the big digital copiers at your local office supply or copy shop, it's the same process— only they use toner instead of ink.

When you call up your local printer (or fill out an online request for a quote), you'll need to know how to describe the color options you want. If you're going for black ink with a striking red spot color, you'll describe it as "2 over 2" or write it as "2/2," which tells the printer that you've got two colors throughout the book. That 4-color process job, on the other hand, would be "4/4". For books that are mostly prose with a few illustrations or pictures here and there, it becomes a case of the highest common denominator. You might have a full color photograph or graphic on only one page of your 20-page self-covering pamphlet, but the whole thing counts as 4/4. Sometimes you can minimize the cost on larger runs, if you restrict your color usage to one signature or one side of the printed sheet. This is one situation where knowing how the print shop intends to run the job can matter, and working with a local print shop, as opposed to an online print-on-demand or gang-run shop, can be a benefit.

If your book has a separate cover and only the cover is in color, then you would describe the job in parts. A cover with color printing on the front with nothing on the inside cover (front or back) and black-and-white text (in printing this just means the body of the book, not the content of the pages) would be a "16-page booklet, 1/1, plus 4/0 cover."

Your printer may ask if your job bleeds. "Bleed" just means that the image extends to the very edge of the paper. Or, technically speaking, that it goes off the edge of the paper.

Unlike your home printer, there is no "borderless printing" option with printing presses. They need something to hold onto on at least one of the edges (aka a gripper). Also, since the presses may be running very large sheets with multiple images or signatures per sheet, these sheets get cut down to their finished sizes after the fact. These cutters are incredibly precise, but even so, it's just not practical to print an image to size and then make sure you cut exactly along the edge, so there's no white border showing. Instead, printers are smart and print bigger than the finished size, then cut into the printed edges to avoid any pesky borders. If you indicate that the image bleeds, that tells the printer to allow more room on the sheet that just your stated page size. It also means you need to set up your files correctly to allow for bleeding.

Designing for Commercial Printing

Now that you're more familiar with printing terminology, it's time to figure out how to get the best possible results from whichever printer you choose. Maybe you're going with a local commercial shop or the nearest FedEx/Kinko's, or maybe you're getting ready to upload your files to one of the many online print-on-demand services out there. Regardless of whom you choose to print your stuff, there's one rule that is universal:

Garbage In = Garbage Out

If you give your printer 72 dpi clipart you yanked off the web (or art for which you paid the minimum on a stock image site for the smallest file size), it's going to look like pixelated crap when it comes off that press and there's nothing anyone can do to fix it. If you don't allow for a bleed in your design, you're going to either end up with a white border around your image or some of the printed area cut off—and that might include  words, if you're not careful! And if you

give them RGB files, the colors you so carefully picked on your computer monitor are very likely to look very, very different.

To avoid those unfortunate situations (and a whole host of others like them), here are some tips on setting up your files correctly for commercial printing.

1. If it's color, it needs to be CMYK.

Anything you see on a screen or monitor is RGB and uses light to adjust the colors blended from the red, green, and blue values present. This visible light spectrum is amazing and can give you over 16 million distinct color variations. And since your computer dictates what your home printer prints, those colors come out pretty close to what you intend.

Commercial presses, on the other hand, work in CMYK, and CMYK is limited to a measly 1 million colors, give or take. That's where problems set in. There's no foolproof method (though there are plenty of strategies) to convert an RGB file for printing in CMYK and retaining the same brilliance of color you see on your RGB monitor, so it's important to create your color files in a program that supports CMYK and to select that mode from the very beginning.

Another thing that makes colors hinky is your computer monitor. Just because what you see on your screen looks right, doesn't mean your screen is showing you the truth. Every time you adjust your monitor's brightness, contrast, etc., you are increasing the chance that what you see is not what you'll get. If exact colors are crucial, look into calibrating your monitor. There are programs and devices that will do this (for a fee, of course), but you can also use simple tests and the controls on your monitor or laptop to do it yourself (search for Monitor Calibration to locate the appropriate process).

2.Less is not more when it comes to DPI. Resolution matters.

CMYK printing works by laying down four layers of teeny tiny dot patterns (generally only visible under a loupe) to determine the strength of each color. They work in percentages and the dots can be very spread out or very close together; the smaller the dots, the crisper the images. Potentially. These dots are measured per inch (dpi = dots-per-inch).

300 dpi is about the smallest you ever want to submit to a printer. The downside is that these files can be rather big, especially with more layers and details within each file, but 300 dpi is the happy medium in the struggle between file size and image quality. Occasionally, for very large items (like banners and large signs), a printer may request a lower dpi, but that's truly the exception to the rule.

And just because you set up your file to be 300dpi doesn't mean you can slap a 72 dpi (the usual resolution for web images—smaller files means quicker loading times) image in there, drag to the right size and have it come out the same. The more you try to stretch a small file to fill a large space, the fuzzier the image will become.

That said, most digital cameras save photos at 180 dpi. DO NOT go in and change the resolution! Those 180 dpi files are also around 2765x2074 pixels; unless you're wanting to blow them up to billboard

size (and who knows, maybe even then), that's plenty of pixels to work with.

3. Set up your bleeds and gutters correctly.

This is one of those things that really separates the novices from the in-the-know. If you're using an online printer, chances are they've got templates you can download for the various products that show the different areas of the file you submit. The live area is the safe zone for all your important details and images. The cut line lies just outside and shows where the images will be cut off; it's usually 1/8" to 1/4" outside of that safe area. Finally, the bleed line is 1/8" all the way around your cut image.

When you create a page for printing, you'll need to add ?" (or 0.125) to each side of your page, so a total of ¼" (0.25) to the length and width of your page size. If your design program supports guides, you'll want to set them to the actual page size to show where your finished image will stop. Anything you want to extend "off the page" needs to go all the way out to the true margins of the image, while all of your text needs to stay well within your guides.

The gutter is the area left blank along the bound edge to prevent your contents from being hard to read—usually in a thick, perfect-bound book. For very thick books you may need to add up to half an inch to the inside edges of your pages to make sure your content is easily visible. Making a dummy of your book or examining books from your own collection can help you figure out how much—or even if—you need to allow for additional gutter.

4. All PDFs are not created equal.

PDFs are probably the most common and most universally accepted file format for printing these days, but they do come in different flavors. Most PDF files are intended for transmission by email or web download, so they're lean, stripped down, and not meant for more than printing on your home printer.

By contrast, the type of PDF you need to submit to a printer is a print-ready PDF, and it has a few more bells and whistles. For one thing, any fonts you used in creating your document need to be embedded, to prevent any issues when the printer opens them up. If the fonts are not embedded and the printer doesn't have those fonts, the computer will pick a font it thinks might match, but it's just a computer and it isn't going to always make the best decisions. And the more automated the process, the less likely it is that someone will notice before it gets to you. (Though this is also a reason to request a proof, even if there's a slight upcharge or time delay; better safe than sorry).

A print-ready PDF also retains the highest quality version of the document you created, so it will have a larger file-size than one intended for web distribution. To insure the maximum compatibility between systems, ask if your printer has a .joboptions file available. This document gets placed in the appropriate folder of your system and will be available as an option when you export your PDF, which will help to prevent many mistakes along the way.

When you've created a multi-page document, it's best to export these as multi-page PDFs, with the pages in the order in which they will be read. (The printer will determine the print layout; trying to do that bit yourself will cause the prepress department untold headaches.) To do this you'll need a desktop publishing program like Adobe InDesign or the open source Scribus to do it natively, or a copy of Acrobat (this is different from the free Reader that you need just to open the files) to string your separately-created pages together. Single-sheet items like postcards or posters are fine to save as individual images per page.

If PDF isn't accepted by your printer or isn't an option in your system, a .tiff file is better than a .jpg. If a .jpg is all you can manage, make it the highest quality you can and don't keep re-saving it, as each time you do, you'll lose some image quality in the process. PNG and GIF files are not good formats for print-ready files.

5. Always proof your job before sending it to your printer.

By this, I mean print it out and physically look at it. Make sure everything is where you think it needs to be and that all images are printing where you put them (and that nothing is printing where it shouldn't). Check for text being cut off, weird page breaks in prose, and wonky anything. While you should always request a proof from your print vendor, that proof is more to make sure that their computer read the file the way you intended it to, that the pages are flowing in the right order, and that the colors are correct—it's not the time to make fiddly changes in your layout, catch typos or anything else you should have taken care of before the printer received the files. Why? Because they will charge you extra for processing any new files you send them and for remaking that proof. That is money you do not have to spend if you properly proof your job before it gets to the printer.

Production quality is one of hallmarks of a professional publisher. If we, as creators, take the time to ensure that our finished products are professional in appearance as well as in content, that's one more step towards shaking off the "vanity press" stigma self-publishing still carries in some circles.

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Jennifer "Scraps" Walker is the author and artist of What to Feed Your Raiding Party, the comic book cookbook for gamers (whattofeedyourraidingparty.com). She has also spent the last 19 years working for a commercial print shop in Tallahassee, Florida.

# SHINY STARGAZING

An Interview with Sally-Anne Hickman (By Darren Worrow).

Unique to the world of the self-publishing is the mini-comic. Often hand-made or hand-decorated, these little art pieces charm in a way that big-time publishers can't hope to achieve. They make the reader feel as if they hold something individually innovative, designed personally for them in their hands, and in most cases, they do. That personal touch is often associated with a female market, and one such princess of the genre in the UK is the marvellous Sally-Anne Hickman, whose frank and honest diary mini-comics always spark a shock. If she turns to adventurous media, such as edible comics, or simply a theme like "tales of smelly dogs" or "freaky food," you can guarantee that she will surpass the female demographic and appeal to all. There is something amazing and unique about Sally's cartoons, which is why I was so keen to catch up with her.

SP!: Hi, Sally; welcome to SP!. I was introduced to your cartoons in the last decade, when I discovered the comic "Whatever!" at Caption (a UK comic convention). Put out by Cheese Comics, it was cleverly written by Mickey Blumental, whose hard-lined writing style contradicted the more hippy-chick nature of you artwork. I thought it worked really well and went off to discover more about Cheese Comics. Can you tell me how you got started with that?

SAH: I met Mickey at university, where we studied animation together in 1999. He showed me a webcomic that he was making and I thought he was insane! It was about three years later that we actually sat down and started creating together.

SP!: So is Cheese Comics no more?

SAH: At the moment, Cheese Comics is taking a break. Mickey is on the other side of the world, working on his games designs career, so there is the possibility of Cheese Comics doing something similar in a flash game. Mickey is such a talented writer to work with, so fingers crossed for another story in the future!

SP!:What about prior to this? It may be a clichéd question, but did you enjoy drawing as a child and dream of being a cartoonist?

SAH: I loved drawing as a child and I guess, at some point, I probably wanted to be a cartoonist. It's the best job in the world! My dream would be to work on something like Horrible Histories; I think they are great.

SP!: What comics did you read and who inspires you?

SAH: I used to love Garfield when I was younger. Something about the way the lasagne was drawn has made me obsessed with drawing cartoon food! Later on, I discovered The Sandman, which at the time, was incredible. Now we are so lucky with the quality of comics and graphic novels being published. My all-time heroes would have to include Julie Doucet, Jeffrey Brown, Robert Crumb, and Gabrielle Bell. They are all autobiographical cartoonists, which is why they have made such an impact on me and my work. Also, there are many great publishers popping up, raising awareness of the graphic novel. Self Made Hero and Nobrow are putting out incredible titles that really show that there is much more out there than superhero comics. Nobrow

puts out beautiful books that verge on fine art and are printed in a very vibrant and striking way.

SP!: Tell us more about the concept of your diary comics and how individually handmade are they?

I started drawing diary comics in 2001. I've continued to do them over all these years, with just a few gaps here and there. I started it as a way of remembering my last year at university and at that time, the comics were quite brief and drawn naively. Not a lot of people have seen 'the early years,' and now that I have so many, I'm thinking of self-publishing a compendium volume! That involves a lot of editing and soul-searching, looking at my life over ten years ago is quite daunting! At the moment, I continue to make them hand-bound and stitched, with the addition of rhinestones to the cover. I've put so much of myself into the diary that it feels like I'm giving away part of myself. I want the diary to feel that way, like it could actually be the real thing.

SP!: Edible comics were the ones that made me smile, but I'm not sure a mini-comic would be enough for me; a whole graphic novel, perhaps! Tell us how you made these. They sound like they would surely be a rarity one day, if they are as tempting as they sound!

SAH: My Edible comics have become much more popular than I ever would have thought. I have the covers printed with edible ink on rice paper. I then hand-draw each page with an edible ink pen and stitch the whole thing together with dental floss. The idea is that you can clean your teeth after you have eaten it! I have also embellished the covers with edible glitter and gold spray paint—also edible! Phew! The inner papers are raspberry and vanilla flavored and taste pretty good. They are, of course, 100 percent vegetarian.

SP!: I understand you love to attend the growing list of comic conventions. Is this the best way to distribute a product that is so unique and personal, or are you just always up for a party?!

SAH: I do love a good comic convention. I love the buzz of selling my own comics and meeting my audience first-hand. I always think it's nice to be behind your product to sell it. With something as unique as my edible comics and diaries, the people who buy them appreciate meeting the creator. There are so many great conventions in the UK now, we are spoiled for choice. The highlights of the year for me are the Comiket fairs, which happen twice a year. They have a drawing parade on a big screen with music chosen by the artist drawing at the time. They also have talks and workshops the whole week, so there are dozens of activities and events to attend and opportunities to meet other artists. When I want to go further afield, Thought Bubble is brilliant. It's great to see something that started off low-key grow and grow into a huge festival attended by international comic stars! Another highlight, and perhaps spiritual journey, is the Angouleme Comics Festival, which happens in a remote part of France; this year was the 40th anniversary. This event is something you have to experience first-hand, and is a must for any fan or creator of this medium! And, of course, the parties are always fun.

SP!: You are an official London Underground busker and have made a comic of autobiographical strips about this. Do you write your own songs and if so, how similar a process is it to writing the comics?

SAH: I do write my own songs. I find that this creative process is completely different from making comics. I think, in some way, that it all must come from the same place inside, but to access it, you have to go through different channels. I find it much easier to draw comics than to perform music. When making comics, you can push it out there and not have to worry or have the massive anxiety of performing; the comic is made and you can't change it. Whereas getting on a stage, there are an infinite number of things that could go wrong. However, I feel a greater satisfaction from playing in an open mike night than from selling at a comic convention. It must be about taking a bigger risk and the payoff is consequently bigger.

SP!: So what are you working on at the moment, Sally?

SAH: At the moment, I am working with a special needs child in a primary school. He has difficulty understanding language and communication and I have been drawing comics with him as a way for him to access the lesson and gain an understanding of the wider world. It has been challenging, but also very rewarding to see how far he has come on with art therapy. Comics are a brilliant way to

encourage reading and writing with children and I am so lucky I have had the chance to help someone by using this medium.

This year, I have started to keep a blog, I think it's important to have an online presence and blogs are great for this. I post once a week with recent projects I have been working on. So far, I have posted a visual diary of my trip to Angouleme, various diary comics, and also, due to demand, a YouTube video of me singing. So you can have a fully-rounded shinystars experience!

SP!: I'm interested to know your thoughts on the ever-changing online comic market. Will it spell death for the printed medium and if so, how could you adapt your material to suit it? Or would you want to, for that matter?!

SAH: I think reading comics on an iPad has an appeal for certain types of readers, one of the positives being that they don't have to store comics in huge boxes that take up lots of space. Webcomics are almost a genre on their own and there is definitely a network of fans and followers that consistently read online. I worked in a great comic shop in Camden (Mega City Comics) for a couple of years, and nothing for me will replace an actual book or a selection of indie comics. It is an experience, which begins with picking up a book and feeling its weight, to opening the page and seeing the artwork pop out. I don't feel that can be replicated when staring into a computer screen; it's too clinical. Having said that, I am making my diary comics set to go more-or-less online instantly; that is the gem of it, and I have had more positive responses in doing so.

SP!: Thanks so much for sharing your time with us, Sally! Is there anything else you would like to add that my fragile aging mind may have missed? Also, could you tell us about your website and/or where our readers can get hold of your comics?

SAH: As I mentioned, I have a blog that I would love people to read that can be found at http://sallyannehickman.blogspot.co.uk/

I have a website with an online shop where you can find my diary comics, edible comics, and lots of other bits like badges and stickers! That's at http://www.sallyshinystars.com/

Thank you for reading, now go and read some comics!

# Twenty questions With

# FORD THEATRE REUNION

Interview by John Wilson
Pictures by Amanda Arnold

John Wilson sits down with Eric Myers of Ford Theatre Reunion to ask about the origins and future of this great band in the form of 20 Questions.

### SP!: What was your first experience with music?

EM: There exists home-movie footage of me, around three years old, running excitedly in circles to Neil Diamond's "Coming to America". Around the same time, my grandmother caught me belting out the chorus to "Serious Business" by John Mellencamp. Sex and violence and rock'n roll! Hard to say which came first.

### SP!: How did that experience influence your desire to play music professionally?

EM: "Sex and violence and rock 'n roll!" Nuff said.

Actually, I had a much more influential experience a few years later, around age five. My mother had a Garth Brooks concert on VHS that I fell head over heels in love with. The giant speakers, the tiered stage, the screaming crowd, and good 'ol Troyal smashing his guitar at the end. I was enamored by the energy of it.

I often imagine what might have become of me if my mother were a bigger GG Allin fan.

### SP!: Is this your first band? If not, what is the musical history?

EM: Technically, I suppose, FTR is my third band. Though, I seem to remember my very first attempt around fifth grade. A friend got a drum set for Christmas, that year. We knew a kid who had a guitar, and I stole my niece's Casiotone. We were bound for glory, but after learning "Jingle Bell Rock" and half of a Hanson song, we got distracted by Madden '97 on our drummer's new Play Station. Thus ended the wild ride of childhood rock stardom.

### SP!: What is the origin of your band?

EM: FTR was born one afternoon in the summer of 2008. Joe, sitting at the counter of the coffee shop where I was working, looked up and said, "Hey, Eric. Do you want to start a circus band?" I thought that seemed like a fine idea, and we began to gather up everyone we knew who played an unusual instrument. That October, we had our first public performance at the aforementioned coffee shop, opening for a real-live professional cabaret band called Vermillion Lies. The show went rather well, if memory serves, and we thought it might be fun to try and do it again sometime.

### SP!: Other than the obvious, why did you choose the name "Ford Theatre Reunion?"

EM: For the record, I can sometimes be a bit dense. What's "the obvious"?

The true story of the name, I'm afraid, is rather mundane. I was working at that very same coffee shop from your last question on the day before our first show. I was talking to one of my regulars about the band and commented on how inappropriate it was that we had our big debut coming up and didn't even have a name for the project. He said, "Well, you should call it... ya know... Ford Theatre Reunion.  Or something like that." So we did. And it stuck.

SP!: Do you ever get any negative response because of the name?

EM: It's funny, actually. People rarely commented on the name before the whole Daniel Day-Lewis thing. People do seem more curious about it now, but I've never had anyone express offense at it. I think it's rather clear that we're not condoning assassination, or trying to hate on Lincoln. I believe I speak for the band when I say he was a stand-up guy.

SP!: Tell me about your band mates. How did this crazy mix of individuals come together?

EM: Once upon a time, in the way back when, all that stuff from three questions ago happened. We rounded up a gang of ten hooligans to form the most chaotic folk-punk band there ever was. At that time, dear Luke played mandolin and an old friend of mine named Kyle Randall was on upright-bass. Several months later, Kyle moved away, and Luke returned to his first four-stringed love. Alex dusted off her old clarinet, as I did my broken down accordion, and we got ourselves up to speed. Joe did what he's always done so brilliantly; brutalize a guitar and scream his head off. Will joined up relatively recently, about six months ago. He and I had played together in a group called The Sepia Tones in our late teens, and hadn't seen much of each other since. However, I knew as soon as he showed up to his first gig with us, wearing an all-white Scarface getup (lapels for days) and designer shades, that we'd found our guy.

An awful lot of other delightful miscreants have come and gone over the years. Fourteen, I believe, in all. And each one has certainly left their mark on the group as a whole.  It makes for a totally nonsensical amalgamation of influences that I, for one, find quite pleasing.

SP!: What do you think makes you unique as a band?

EM: See above. With around eighteen people of wildly varying influences and levels of training having played with FTR, over the years, we've been forced to find creative ways to cram it all together. The number of members has jumped up and down since we started. Now though, as a five-piece, I finally feel like we're able to distill all those ingredients in a rather unique decoction, with jazz and folk on the nose, a heavy metal mouth feel, and a finish of utter nonsense.

SP!: How would you describe your music to someone that has never heard it?

EM: I would probably try to use some contrived liquor analogy. Then I'd recommend they look us up on BandCamp and YouTube. Or, if they're really looking for trouble, I might suggest they come out and see a show.

SP!: What is your process for creating new music?

EM: It tends to vary somewhat drastically from song to song, but we do have a few tried and true methods for getting the ball rolling. A lot of times, one of us—often Joe—will come in with a riff or a few bars of a chord progression. The rest of us will take it, rip it apart, mash it back together, and build five to ten minutes of nonsense all around it. Then we'll write lyrics and call it a song. Other times, we start from a concept, story, or a few rough lyrics and try to set all that to music.

SP!: Do you currently have a piece that you would say is your best?

EM: Best is hard to define. I certainly have favorites. There's one, for instance, that doesn't have a name yet, that I'm quite fond of. We've only played it out a handful of times. Partially because we're trying to save some of the epicness for our new album, but mostly because

it's really damned hard—which is part of what I love about it. It's got all the things I love about this band, all wrapped up together. Quiet vocals, heavy riffs, mixed meters, key changes, big group vocals, breakdowns, builds, etc., etc. It's all over the place, but it seems to work somehow. I love it when that happens.

### SP!: What has been your best experience that you have had as a band? What made it so good?

EM: Tough question. We've done a lot of gallivanting about. Let's see...

This January, we booked a short four-day run with a band from West Virginia that we'd never met before. We had no idea what to expect going into it, but half way through the first night, we were already in band-love. What followed was an extended weekend of musical, personal, and professional chemistry on a scale rarely seen in this business. The highlight is, undoubtedly, the night we all spent together in a freaking mansion. We were being hosted by a friend of ours who does a lot of work with Pandora Promotions in Cincinnati, and stayed up until well past sunrise, floating between the indoor heated pool, arcade room (original 1983 Mario Bros. machine. Seriously.), movie theater, and music rooms. It was the sort of night that just doesn't happen in real life. It certainly ranks high on our list of band shenanigans.

And let me not understate the main point. We. Love. Qiet. Look for much collaboration in the future.

### SP!: What are the worst experiences that you have had as a band? What went wrong?

EM: This one's easy. Last March we had our first show ever in Columbus, OH. It was a big burlesque event at a sideshow-themed bar. Great crowd, good acts, good sound, all in all a very good night. Then, when we got off stage and went out to grab something from the van, we found it had been broken into. We lost a total of around $7,000 in property, including laptops, instruments, school books, and so on. Being robbed, in and of itself, was pretty damn bad, but to have had it happen the first night of a week-long tour was worse. Then add to that the fact that we played all but one of the shows on the rest of that run to 10 or fewer  people a night, and had to have our fuel pump replaced in Michigan, and you could say it was a fairly rough week. Funny thing about it, though. If I'm being perfectly honest, I had a great time on that trip. And I'm pretty sure we all did. There's nothing like shared suffering to bring people together, and I think we all became a lot closer on that damned trip.

### SP!: You are not yet a "signed" band. Is this something that you aspire to or is that even on your radar?

EM: With our new album on the horizon, it's certainly a conversation we've had. There are a lot of things that we would love to do that a label's resources would be essential for. However, I've seen a fair bit of the workings of the major record label industry in my professional life. Enough to know that I want as little to do with it as possible. Fortunately, by blind luck and pure coincidence, we happen to be making music at a time in which, while the big labels are struggling to keep afloat, there is a growing pool of much smaller companies with goals more in line with our own. Independent labels run by people with a genuine love of music. It's a nice thing to see happening. I can't say we're actively looking to get signed, but if one of those companies came a callin', I think we'd be open to the conversation.

### SP!: What are your plans for the future of the band?

EM: Simple. World domination.

Honestly, right now, we're totally focused on finishing and releasing the new album. We're real damned excited about it. Making it has been a tremendous experience. I seriously cannot wait to get it out there. What happens after that... well that mostly depends on if anyone but us actually listens to it.

### SP!: Is there one image or symbol that you think best describes your band's arching idea?

EM: Lucy. Lucy comes on the road with us. Sometimes she helps with merch.

SP!: Your music is used on the Charlie Tonic Hour's companion podcast, Bottoms Up. How did that happen?

EM: We've known Charlie and Ginny for a couple years, through their work with Pandora Promotions. Then, last year, around this time, I think, Charlie interviewed us for a segment on CTH. We ended up talking with him for hours, and what was supposed to be a 10 to 20 minute segment turned into a full episode. After that, we all kept in contact regularly, in addition to working on shows with them. Long story short, we've become good friends. So, when I got a message asking for permission to use our music, it wasn't much of a decision. It's wonderful to see their show doing so well that they're ready to expand. They've put their hearts into it and it certainly shows.

SP!: Do you have any desire for your music to be used in other venues, like commercials, TV, or movies?

EM: I wouldn't characterize it as a "desire". If someone wants to pay for the rights to use "Burning House" in a home insurance commercial, though, we'd be willing to talk details.

SP!: What are some of the gigs that you will be playing in the near future?

EM: We have so much coming up. If things go according to plan, we'll be playing more shows this year than in the rest of our history combined. So, what to plug...

On Easter Sunday, we're co-hosing "The Rabid Rabbit Rampage" with our good friends from Jack Holiday & The Westerners, in Louisville. We're doing a whole theme thing with decorations and an egg hunt for fabulous prizes. Like free beer.

Then we head out for two and a half weeks this April, to make our way back through the South. We adore the South. Especially in the springtime. Highlights will certainly be Asheville, which we're quickly learning to love, and New Orleans. Quite possibly our favorite town of them all. It's always great to take a couple days off down there to see the city and play on street corners. It's an utterly unique culture and a tremendously interesting place to explore.

At the end of that run comes The Steampunk Empire Symposium, and I can't imagine a better way to cap off a big tour than to spend three days out of time and space with some of the loveliest people we've had the pleasure of meeting on our travels. And Qiet will be there, too. It promises to be a legendary weekend.

SP!: Where can people find you on the web?

I'd recommend thefordtheatrereunion.com and Facebook. We also try and keep up with Twitter; follow us @FTR_ftw. Lately, we've been working to up our YouTube presence. Keep an eye out there for all sorts of neat surprises!"

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